

Biltmore Village Historic District was designated a Local Historic District in 1987 by Asheville City Council. Located at the entrance to Biltmore Estate, the village is a collection of small businesses. Its original function, however, was to serve as a village complete with homes, shops, a hospital, school, and church for the employees at George Vanderbilt's famous mansion.

Before Vanderbilt, as early as 1784, settlers built along the Swannanoa River delta in the area now known today as Biltmore Village. The Swannanoa Settlement grew into a town center. However, by 1840, the town center and its primary retail establishments moved to the area now recognized as Pack Square. The community left behind was commonly identified as the Town of Best or Asheville Junction.

By 1881 the community could boast of the first train station in the Asheville area. The town also had a gristmill, a post office, an icehouse and several small commercial establishments. By the mid-1880s George W. Vanderbilt arrived and purchased 125,000 acres to create the finest country estate and village in America. After the purchase, the small town of Best was destined to become something greater. At the turn-of-the-nineteenth-century George W. Vanderbilt built a manorial village to service Biltmore Estate.

From the beginnings of Biltmore Village in the early 1880s, Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1895) and Fredric Law Olmsted (1822-1903) carried out the vision of Vanderbilt. Biltmore Village originated as a planned mixed-use community in the English village tradition designed by Hunt and Olmsted. Richard Sharp Smith (1852-1924) came to work for Hunt in the 1890s. Together their early designs exhibit those picturesque features typical in English and Norman building traditions and landscape features.

In 1886, the year after the estate opened, the roads, church, parish house, rectory, estate office and depot had been completed by Hunt. The streets were laid out in a fan shape with All Souls Church at the pivot point. Opposite the church, Biltmore Plaza was laid out in a tapered shape so passengers arriving on the train had an exaggerated perspective view of the church. This central axis and plaza was the focus for Biltmore Village.

By 1901, twelve cottages were completed by Smith, with requests from Mr. Vanderbilt for additional cottages. From a land-use point of view, the village was planned with four sub-areas: the Village Core (commercial), Cottage Areas (residential), Mixed-Use Areas and Major Public Institutional Areas. Each area displayed its own architectural style yet blended nicely with adjacent areas through transitional style buildings. The architecture of this little town is defined by pebble-dashed walls, tiled roofs, and half-timbering with English-cottage and Romanesque style influences.

Before George Vanderbilt died in 1914, he must have been very proud of the village he had created – a seed he planted and nourished for the people outside his gates. Then in 1916 the Swannanoa River flooded drowning several people and damaging village buildings. Four years later, Mrs. Vanderbilt sold most of the village. She tried to protect the integrity of the town by including incredible deed restrictions in the sale, but was never enforced. Renovation of remaining cottages into specialty shops in more recent years has been a positive force in maintaining some of the ambience of the original Biltmore Village.